

CONJUNCTIVITIS FACT SHEET (PINK EYE)

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is an infection or irritation of the eye. It can be caused by a variety of bacteria and viruses often accompanying a respiratory illness. Chemicals, allergies and other irritants can also cause it. Conjunctivitis causes redness of the whites of the eyes and watery eyes. It can also cause yellowish or greenish discharge from the eyes and crusty eyelashes when the child wakes up. Children might complain of a gritty or itchy feeling in the eyes and sensitivity to light. Conjunctivitis can begin in one eye but usually ends up involving both eyes. The symptoms typically last for 3-5 days.

How is it spread?

Infectious conjunctivitis (e.g., caused by bacteria or virus) is spread by contact with secretions from the eye, nasal mucus and saliva. It can spread through droplets coughed or sneezed into the air, and secretions on hands, tissues linens and make-up.

When is it contagious?

Conjunctivitis is contagious only when it is caused by bacteria or viruses; not by chemicals or allergies. Infectious conjunctivitis is contagious from 1-2 days before the symptoms appear until 24 hours after antibiotic treatment is started (for bacterial conjunctivitis); and there is no redness or discharge from the eyes (for viral conjunctivitis). After exposure to conjunctivitis, it usually takes 2-3 days to develop the infection.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

Their health care provider should see children with conjunctivitis. The health provider might prescribe antibiotic eye drops or ointment to treat infectious conjunctivitis.

When may my child return to school?

A child with infectious conjunctivitis should stay home until 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment and/or until there is no discharge from the eyes, or until released by physician.

How can the spread be limited?

- Encourage children not to rub their eyes. Have children wash their hands after touching their eyes and nose.
- Use disposable tissues and paper towels. Do not share handkerchiefs, washcloths, hand towels or bed linen.
- Wash your hands well after touching the child's eyes, applying eye medications and blowing noses.